

Fortaleza's Progress Shows that Change is Still Possible in Brazil

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The capital of Ceará sees traffic fatalities drop to the lowest level in 15 years after creating a mobility strategy with speed reduction interventions, priority bus lanes, and cycling infrastructure.



Fortaleza has shown the impact that small, low-cost interventions can have on quality of life. Pedestrian improvements such as this raised crosswalk massively improve pedestrian safety and access to the streets.

Photo: Fortaleza City Hall

With 2.6 million inhabitants and rapidly growing, Fortaleza is Brazil's fifth largest city and fourth most popular tourist destination. From 2010 to 2015, the city's fleet of vehicles increased by 40%, while the population grew only by 5.7%. Motorbikes increased three times more than cars. The city had massive congestion and one of the highest death tolls in the country. When Mayor Roberto Claudio was elected in 2013, he made tackling traffic congestion a priority with the launch of a Plan for Immediate Interventions on Transport and Traffic in Fortaleza (PAITT - Plano de Ações Imediatas em Trânsito e Transporte). With a sustainable approach to mobility policies, emphasizing public transport, traffic safety measures, walking, and cycling infrastructures. By 2016, the annual monitoring system of traffic accidents revealed the lowest number of road traffic deaths in 15 years.

A BROADER CONTEXT

For decades, transport planning in Brazil has focused on improving the conditions for automobiles at the expense of public transport, pedestrians, and cyclists. The automobile industry has been central to Brazil's economy since the 1960s, shaping policies and incentives to own cars. Cities' regulations were modified to accommodate private vehicles, increase road capacity and ensure parking spaces were available at both origin and destination. As a result, public transport ridership has decreased by over 25% in the last decade, while the automobile fleet has doubled.

The country has an exceptional regulatory framework for sustainable urban mobility. After decades of debate, in 2012, the National Urban Mobility Policy was adopted to reshape the direction of the country's mobility plans and guide



transport investments. This policy stresses public transport, walking, cycling, and more integration between transport and land use policies. In parallel, the Growth Acceleration Program (PAC) pledged over 150 billion BRL for transport infrastructure.

However, a recent assessment by the Ministry of Cities showed only 15 out of 329 transport projects contracted were finalized, due to lack of technical capacity. There is mounting pressure by society on the government to be more prompt and adept in their urban mobility planning. That includes dialogue with the population, project design, identification of sources of funding and financing, ensuring project quality throughout the execution and monitoring & evaluation frameworks.

While the rest of the country has put most investments on hold due to the political and economic crisis, Fortaleza shows resilience and the political will to advance sustainable mobility.

CHANGE AHEAD

Learning from best practices implemented by progressive cities such as New York and Bogotá, the city has had an intense technical exchange with other cities and support from non-governmental organizations. PAITT looks at short- to medium-term, low-cost transport solutions. The city also looked at strategies to encourage active transport, such as cycling and walking, and measures to lower the speed of vehicles—a crucial step to reduce the high numbers of road deaths.

With the Bloomberg Initiative for Global Road Safety (BIGRS), a key partner in Fortaleza, PAITT has gained extra strength. Speed reduction interventions have been rolled out in hotspots where traffic injuries are highest. These measures include speed reduction of arterial lanes, narrowing traffic lanes, adding bike paths, raised pedestrian crossings, curb extensions, and redesigning of unsafe intersections.

Temporary interventions such as Cidade da Gente (People's City) had demonstrated urban transformation is possible. As an example, the residential neighborhood of Cidade 2000 shifted road priority from vehicles to pedestrians by turning 1,200 square meters of parking space and traffic lanes into a pedestrian area.



A recreation of a classic photo series showing the amount of space needed to transport the same number of people on bikes, transit, and cars.
Photo: ITDP Brazil



Cycle lanes and crosswalks are some of the ways Fortaleza is demonstrating priority for pedestrians and cyclists on its streets.
Photos: Fortaleza City Hall

The city has added over 111 km of bus lanes since 2013, with improved travel time for the 1,200 thousand trips a day. With the dedicated lanes, average bus speed increased from 4.4 to 13.5 km/h. The optimization of overlapping bus lines on the city's main bus corridor resulted in saving 9.2 tons of CO² per day. All 2,251 city buses have wifi, GPS and air conditioning. Recently, seven terminals were refurbished including integration with Light Rail Train (LRT) and subway.

The cycle network has grown 350%, or 170 km, since 2013. In 2014, a Cycling Infrastructure Strategic Plan was delivered, with a total grid plan of 524 km. With a cycling policy in place, the government has tagged investments for the cycling infrastructure. In August this year, revenue from the digital Zona Azul, a new on-street parking regulation system, was secured to be reinvested into bike lanes. Annual bike counts conducted by the city have seen a 153% increase in the number of cyclists from 2012 to 2017.

The city has now four bicycle sharing systems. The main one, Bicicletar (operator Sertell and sponsor UNIMED), has 80 stations (with 6 trips per day per bike, it is one of the most used in Brazil). Bicicleta Integrada is a system specific for the last mile. Seven stations and 350 bicycles are located in the bus terminals. The system runs with an Integrated public transport Fare card—there is no need to have a credit card, and users can stay for 14 hours with the bicycles (overnight)—which makes it accessible and equitable. One-third of users are women. Mini Bicicletar is a system with 50 bicycles located next to plazas, specifically for children, which is critical to encouraging toddlers and children using a bike for the first time. Finally, Bicicletar Corporativo is a pilot project to test a model for the corporate sector. Currently, there are 6 stations and 14 bikes at City Hall for public officials to ride. They can take bikes overnight and stay up to 20 hours. 42% of Bicicletar Corporativo users are women and 40% are between 45 and 60 years old.

The sharing system has moved beyond bikes in Fortaleza. Vamo is the first public electric car sharing system in the country, with 16 stations and 20 vehicles. On-demand travel with electric vehicles and ride sharing, along with greater use of public transport, cycling, and walking is the roadmap to reduce car travel and change the future cities.

Public space is one of the most important elements for a dignifying citizenship experience. To counterbalance the car hegemony of today's cities, we need to engage citizens and show them what can be done to enhance the public space.

In face of growing political conservatism and backward agendas, Fortaleza demonstrates that through creativity, innovation, and leadership it is possible to promote sustainable mobility. It gives us hope that political will combined with the capacity to prioritize and roll out mobility and people-friendly streets is not only the future we want - but a future we can deliver.